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TAGS: [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH MP'S VISIT TO ARMENIA MARRED BY HEATED
COMMENTS ON EVENTS OF 1915

Classified By: Amb. John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) A member of the Turkish parliament made Armenian news June 13 when he got into a verbal scuffle with Armenian National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosyan during a rare visit to Armenia. Twenty parliamentarians visited Armenia June 12-14 on an information-gathering trip managed by the NATO international staff. MP Vahit Erdem, vice president of the NATO PA and one of three Turkish MPs in the group (the other two being Faruk Unsal and Muharrem Karsli) said during a closed meeting with the Speaker that there was no official Ottoman government order to kill Armenians in 1915, and that therefore, the events cannot be considered genocide. Torosyan countered that Erdem had no right to assess the events of 1915, nor to judge the countries that have recognized them to be a genocide. The contretemps was the subject of news reports by two media outlets, despite the fact that delegation staffers cleared all journalists from the room before the meeting took place. The same Turkish MP also made heated comments about Armenian-Turkish relations during a panel discussion with Armenian NGO representatives held at the U.S. Embassy. End Summary.

1915 COMES UP IN CONVERSATION

12. (C) Vahit Erdem (Justice and Development Party/AKP) made Armenian news June 13 when he got into a verbal scuffle with Armenian National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosyan. Erdem was one of the leaders of the NATO PA delegation that visited Yerevan June 12-14 on a fact-finding mission. One of the delegation's staffers characterized the group as "reasonably educated generalists trying to broaden their knowledge." In addition to their meeting with Torosyan, the parliamentarians met with representatives of the OSCE, visited the MFA, the National Security Service, the National Assembly and the MOD, and attended two panel discussions with Armenian NGO representatives at the U.S. Embassy.

13. (C) According to press reports corroborated by delegation staffer Zachary Seldon, during the June 13 meeting with Torosyan, the delegation presented the Speaker its draft regional report, which said vaguely that international supporters of Armenia had recognized the Armenian "genocide." Torosyan suggested the language be changed to reflect

specifically that EU member-states and the European Parliament had recognized the "genocide." After that, Erdem said no genocide ever occurred, that there was never an official order to kill Armenians, and that the Armenians, egged on by the Russians, had "attacked the Turks first." Torosyan interrupted Erdem, and said that, as a member of an international delegation, Erdem had no right to assess the events of 1915, nor to judge the countries that had recognized them to be a genocide. According to the group's interpreter, who is known to Post as a reliable source, Torosyan kept his cool throughout the exchange. Some members of the NATO-PA delegation reportedly shared Torosyan's sentiment and later criticized Erdem for taking a national position while acting in his role as a leading member of an international delegation. Seldon noted privately that the parliamentarian had stepped clearly beyond the bounds appropriate to his position in the delegation.

ANTI-TURKISH STORY LEAKED TO PRESS

¶4. (C) The exchange was reported June 14 in the state-run newspaper Hayastani Hanrapetutюн (Armenian Republic), and in Regnum, an online Russian-language media outlet. Seldon noted that there were four journalists in the meeting room before the meeting began, but that they had complied with his request to leave. He said he was dismayed that the story had leaked out, and noted that no other members of the Armenian National Assembly were present at the meeting. It is unclear whether Torosyan had any aides with him during the meeting.

¶5. (C) Erdem also became heated during one of the panel discussions with Armenian NGO representatives that took place

at the U.S. Embassy June 12. During the discussion, Armenian Atlantic Association Executive Director Tevan Poghosyan, whose NGO aims to foster better understanding among Armenians of NATO's mission and activities, accused Turkey of accepting the status quo of Armenian-Turkish relations, rather than working to normalize them. Erdem countered that Turkey was doing everything in its power to normalize relations. The rest of the delegation remained somewhat awkwardly silent.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) It is rare that Turkish officials visit Armenia, and the atmospherics vary by case. Turkish Ambassador Daryal Batibay was here a year ago with the Council of Europe's "Ago Group" and there was no contretemps of any kind. But it is not only the visitors who vary case by case. Former National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdasarian spoke often and with conviction about the need for Armenia to "get aboard the train to Europe that is Turkey," rather than "lying on the tracks in front of it." He boasted of his relationship with his Turkish opposite number, with whom he claimed to be planning to move relations forward through intra-Parliamentary contacts. Baghdasarian is now out of the Speakership, and it remains to be seen whether Torosyan, who lacks as yet the broad international contacts cultivated by his predecessor and has a much less outgoing persona, will be willing or able to use his new office to good effect on the frustratingly unhappy state of Turkish-Armenian relations. The exchange of invective reported above probably will not encourage the new Armenian Speaker to reach out to his Turkish counterparts, at least in the short run. END COMMENT.

EVANS